Town set to move forward with public LED lights

By Brock Weir

Aurora's new LED lights for streets and public parking lots haven't even been given the official green light yet, but some already want to see a return on their potential investment.

Councillors are set to sign off on a plan this week to install LED lighting into parking lots at the Aurora Family Leisure Complex (AFLC) and the Stronach Aurora Recreation Complex (SARC) in 2014. Councillors considered a tender for the double-barrelled project last week, which would clock in at just under $100,200.

Over at the AFLC on Industrial Parkway North, the plan includes replacing 10 wall mounted lights ? currently high pressure sodium lights ? and 10 pole mounted mercury vapour (and five additional pole) lights with LED units. According to a report before Council from Ilmar Simanovskis, Aurora's Director of Infrastructure, the new installations at the AFLC will save between 55 and 60 per cent of current energy consumption.

At the SARC, Mr. Simanovskis proposes replacing 24 pole mounted mercury lights with LED counterparts, for an estimated energy savings of 68 per cent.
Town-wide, however, a complete overhaul of all street lights in Aurora to LED could be in the offing, pending approval of the 2014 budget. At last week's Council meeting, Councillors were generally in favour of moving over to a more energy effective lighting alternative, but questioned the cost of the lights themselves.

?I can see statistics on reduced energy usage and they are quite impressive,? said Councillor Chris Ballard on the LEDs, but he questioned the payback to the town in dollars in terms of the energy costs which will be avoided.

Many of his own lights, he added, were LED but what was once a high priced bulb a handful of years ago has markedly come down in price since then.
?From an environmental perspective, we should be replacing everything with LED and we should be doing it tomorrow,? he added. ?From a financial prudence perspective, I just want a little more evidence. It's hard to judge with electrical rates going up, but maybe if we put this off for two years, it might be an $85,000 project.?

Mr. Simanovskis said that when it comes to the streetlight replacement, the payback is expected to be 10 years, but the lights for the two rec centres could be in the range of 12 ? 15 years because it includes the costs of adding poles. If installing new polls were not in the equation, this payback time could be halved to between five and seven years.

Nevertheless, Councillor Ballard said he still had concerns. A major project of replacing Aurora's streetlights is one thing, but smaller projects are another matter. He also questioned how long the products lasted and whether Aurora would be considering replacements again in 12 years' time.

?It might be the right thing to do in terms of energy conservation, but from a financial conservation perspective, I am not 100 per cent convinced on a small project like this,? he said. ?If these systems are going to last for 20 years and payback is in 12, that would make me happier, but $100,000 buys an awful lot of electricity.?

Speaking in favour of the plan, Councillor John Abel said with a significant forecasted increase in Ontario energy bills over the next five years, such payback might be coming back to Aurora in spades. He said other municipalities do not need ?proof positive? before making a decision.

?It would seem payback is going to be accelerated in quick fashion,? he said. ?We have to recognize that under our current hydro in our province, we're not going anywhere but up. It is prudent for a municipality to not only think of green, but survival and sustainability.?

Added Mayor Geoffrey Dawe: ?I think it is fiscally prudent that we look at doing this to mitigate our future electricity costs. We have to be looking now into the future.?

When questioned by Councillor Wendy Gaertner into the success of a pilot project done last year replacing select light poles along Murray Drive to LED to assess the quality of the lighting, and if any cost savings were estimated out of that, Mr. Simanovskis said the one-year study was too small for exact numbers, but there was indeed an energy savings from Power Stream.